



Lifting Life's Possibilities

Alabama * DMHMR Outlook

March/April 2007

FROM THE COMMISSIONER



Individuals with significant disabilities, including cognitive disabilities, often have limited opportunities for inclusive vocational training and/or employment considerations and, as such, are limited in the choices available to them for making meaningful life decisions. Many of these individuals would like to explore opportunities outside traditional day habilitation environments currently designed specifically for them.

Because this department promotes inclusiveness and supports individual choice, I am excited about Project ABILITY, a pilot project I am initiating in the department's Central Office which, hopefully, will provide a meaningful work opportunity for those who currently face vocational and employment challenges. I am hopeful this project will demonstrate the viability of creative work opportunities for individuals with the most significant disabilities and provide an alternative to traditional programs if individuals so desire. I am confident this model will be successful and given time, can be replicated throughout the state system and, subsequently, in almost any business environment with appropriate supports in place. I will be advocating for such replication.

I have identified an individual, Ryan Prince, who will be our first participant. As we move through this first pilot, criteria for accepting and assigning participants can be developed. This project holds great potential in transforming the lives of people with significant disabilities by offering them more inclusive opportunities to showcase their abilities, and which can only lead to better life outcomes and full community participation. I am excited about discussing this with the Governor and members of his cabinet. Please welcome and support Ryan Prince into our department and assist him as he begins this new venture. Your support is necessary to make this a successful opportunity for participants and for the department. I look forward to identifying other participants in the near future and ask for continued support as they break new ground for people with the most significant disabilities.

John M. Houston

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Report Shows Substance Abuse Trends

According to a new report from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), the number of admissions to substance abuse treatment for cocaine and heroin abuse declined between 2004 and 2005, but the number of those seeking treatment for narcotic pain or methamphetamine/amphetamine increased sharply during that same time period.

Five substances accounted for 95 percent of all substance abuse treatment admissions in 2005 - alcohol; opiates, primarily heroin; marijuana/hashish, cocaine; and stimulants, primarily meth. At the same time, there are continuing disturbing signs that misuse of prescription drugs is a growing problem.

After six previous years during which the proportion of heroin admissions had exceeded that of cocaine admissions, the proportion of heroin admissions fell below that of cocaine admissions, says Treatment Episode Data Set (TEDS) Highlights 2005. In 2004, there were 259,349 admissions to treatment for cocaine and 266,013 for heroin. In 2005 there were 256,491 admissions for cocaine abuse and 254,345 admissions for heroin.

The total number of people using methamphetamine/amphetamine is small relative to other illicit drugs, with nearly 1.3 million persons ages 12 or older reporting use of the drug in 2005, according to SAMHSA's National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH). But the number of those seeking treatment for methamphetamine/amphetamine increased 12 percent between 2004 and 2005, according to the report. There were 151,649 admissions in 2004, rising to 169,489 in 2005. From 1995 to 2005 there was a 172 percent increase in the number of admissions for methamphetamine/amphetamine, and the proportion of treatment admissions for methamphetamine/amphetamine rose from 4 percent to 9 percent.

The proportion of those seeking treatment for prescription narcotic pain medication increased 9 percent between 2004 and 2005, to 64,120 admissions. Medications abused by those seeking treatment in this category included codeine, hydrocodone, morphine, opium, oxycodone and other drugs with morphine-like effects. Between 1995 and 2005, the number of admissions for these drugs increased more than 300 percent.

The number of those seeking treatment for marijuana abuse decreased slightly from 300,792 in 2004 to 292,250 in 2005. Between 1995 and 2005, the number of treatment admissions for marijuana increased 70 percent. The proportion of admissions for alcohol abuse treatment declined from 52 percent in 1995 (858,287 admissions) to 39 percent in 2005 (723,646 admissions). Forty-five percent of primary alcohol admissions reported secondary drug abuse as well.

TEDS Highlights 2005 provides annual information on demographic and substance abuse characteristics of the 1.8 annual admissions to treatment for abuse of alcohol and drugs in facilities that report to individual state administrative data systems, and is available online at <http://oas.samhsa.gov>.

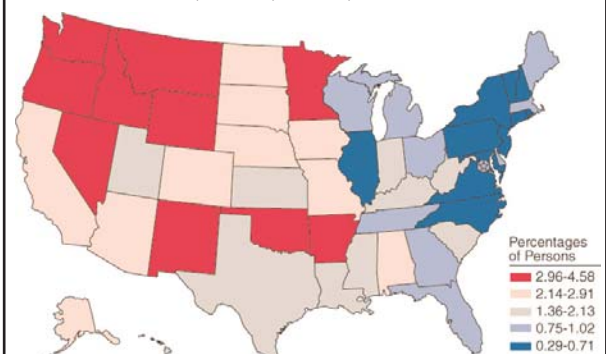
U.S. Mental Health Parity Bill Gets Backing

For the first time since August 2001, a mental health parity bill has been introduced and approved by a Congressional committee. On February 14th, the Senate Health, Education, Labor & Pensions Committee approved the Mental Health Parity Act of 2007 (S. 558) in an 18 – 3 vote.

Sponsored by Senators Kennedy, Domenici and Enzi, the bill has received a wide margin of approval. While concessions were made in the drafting of the bill, mental health parity is extremely important as it ensures full mental health benefits for individuals with psychiatric disabilities who are entering competitive employment. This legislation, known as the Mental Health Parity Act of 2007 (S. 558), would expand an existing 1996 federal law and prohibit employers and health plans from imposing durational treatment limits and financial limitations on coverage for mental illness that do not apply to all other medical conditions.

In the weeks ahead, this bill will go to vote on the Senate floor.

Percentages of Young Adults Aged 18 to 25 Reporting Past Year Methamphetamine Use 2002, 2003, 2004, and 2005



Source: Office of Applied Studies
US Department of Health & Human Services

Annual Employee Awards Ceremony

The Alabama Department of Mental Health & Mental Retardation held its statewide employee awards ceremony recently where three employees were feted for their accomplishments. The Employee of the Year, Caring Hands and Dr. Peter Bryce awards were presented by the Commissioner. Dan Evans was recognized as Employee of the Year from among the department's 2,800 employees. Dan serves as the Data Management Bureau Chief at the department's central office location in downtown Montgomery, and has been with the department for more than 30 years. He was chosen from a list of nominees from all facilities across the state, as well as from central office nominees.

The Employee of the Year award recognizes outstanding service in areas related to compassionate service to patients/clients/consumers and a positive attitude, initiative, and teamwork, among others. Dan was nominated saying, "Although Dan does not have direct contact with our consumers, he has a complete understanding of the Department's mission. He has been to every facility and observed the needs of the consumers and the staff who administer care. He keeps focused on the fact that everything he does is related to the people we serve."

Elias Johnson, Mental Health Worker I at W.D. Partlow Developmental Center, received the Caring Hands award, which recognizes outstanding service by a direct care (non-licensed) staff member in areas related to compassionate service to patients/clients/consumers, positive attitude, teamwork, initiative and creativity. Those who nominated Elias said, "His rapport with family members is remarkable. He is the one they seek out when visiting their relative to discuss events, programs and how their relative is doing."

Dr. Tom Patton, D.M., director of Bryce Hospital Dental Clinic, received the Dr. Peter Bryce award. This award is given to an outstanding licensed staff member who has displayed teamwork, a positive attitude, compassionate service to patients, clients and consumers, outstanding performance in any unusual or emergency situation, and improvements in procedure. In his nomination, it was said, "Under Dr. Patton's direction, each patient receives an annual dental exam, and he always takes the time to explain to the patient what is going on, and what he plans to do to help. He has always made sure all of their questions are answered, and that they receive the highest degree of dental care."

Each recipients received a certificate of recognition, and their accomplishments were shared with all attendees by their facility/divisional directors, as well as the Commissioner. Congratulations to all of these worthy recipients!



Dan Evans (m) with Commissioner Houston and Associate Commissioner Otha Dillihay as he accepts his award for Employee of the Year.



Elias Johnson accepts the Caring Hands award from Commissioner Houston.



David Bennett, facility director at Bryce Hospital, accepts the Dr. Peter Bryce award from the Commissioner on behalf of recipient Dr. Tom Patton, who was unable to attend.

Report from the Office of Legislative Affairs

In reviewing recently introduced bills, reports from the Office of Legislative Affairs reflect that there several new bills that are more sensitive to individuals with disabilities which seems to show that advocacy efforts around the state are paying off.

One such bill is House Bill 246, generated by Rep. Randy Davis, among others. This bill seeks to ensure that language in the statutes of the code of Alabama is respectful to individuals with disabilities. The bill also seeks to terminate any derogatory or stigmatic language in reference to those with disabilities. The bill is pending in the House Judiciary committee at this time.

We hope this is a sign that elected officials are recognizing the need to work with and for individuals with disabilities.

Did You Know...

...That March is national Mental Retardation Awareness Month? This year's theme is "Focus On What I Can Do," encourages people to look at what people with mental retardation are capable of first.

In conjunction, the *People Can't Wait Rally* will be held at the state house on Wednesday, March 28 at 11 a.m.

HBO "Addiction" Documentary Makes Its Debut

Recently HBO, Alabama Voices for Recovery and Brighthouse Networks partnered to host the Alabama premiere of the groundbreaking HBO documentary "Addiction." The premiere was held in Birmingham, and Substance Abuse Associate Commissioner Kent Hunt was a guest speaker. "Addiction" is the centerpiece of an unprecedented multi-platform project aimed at helping Americans understand addiction as a chronic but treatable brain disease, and spotlights new medical advancements in treatment.

The 90-minute "Addiction:" documentary debuted March 15 on HBO on Demand. "Addiction" brings together the nation's leading experts with award winning filmmakers.

The total campaign includes the 14-part documentary series, a four-disc DVD set, a companion book "Addiction: Why Can't They Just Stop?," four independent addiction-themed films and a national Web site. The project is produced by HBO in partnership with the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the National Institute on Drug Abuse and the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. "Addiction is a preventable, treatable health condition from which people can and do recover, but most Americans don't understand this. We're pleased to be a part of this project that will increase Americans' knowledge and actions about the reality of effective treatment and recovery from alcohol and drug addictions," said Victor Capoccia with the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

Materials such as the DVD set will be available for purchase to schools and in stores, allowing for greater education to youth and the general public.



DMH/MR employees gather for a picture with various substance abuse advocates from throughout the state.



Kent Hunt, Associate Commissioner of Substance Abuse, speaks at the Alabama premiere of "Addiction."



(L to R): Robert Smith with Brighthouse Networks, Pat Conner with HBO, DMH/MR Commissioner John Houston, and Alabama Voices for Recovery President Bill Layfield were on hand to celebrate the "Addiction" premiere.

To find out more about the HBO documentary "Addiction," including how to order materials, scheduled airings and an in-depth look at understanding addiction, visit the Web site at www.hbo.com/addiction.

2007 Disability Policy Seminar Draws Crowd



Joe Meadours meets with Senator Ted Kennedy during his recent trip to Washington D.C.

Recently, Consumer Empowerment Director Joe Meadours took a trip to Washington, D.C. to attend the 2007 Disability Policy Seminar. The seminar was sponsored by The Arc, American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, Association of University Centers on Disabilities, United Cerebral Palsy and National Association of Councils on Developmental Disabilities. The event offered attendees the opportunity to meet and hear from policymakers and other Capitol Hill experts about current disability policy priorities.

In addition, one of the seminar's highlights was a chance for attendees to educate members of Congress about issues that are important to people with disabilities. Joe got to meet with Senator Kennedy, among others, to discuss topics of concern for Alabama as well as thank to him for what he has done for people with developmental disabilities. He urged Senator Kennedy to educate others about what people with developmental disabilities can do and to seek more tools to give them a better quality of life.

Bryce Hospital Employee Honored by Group

Durand Bass, Director of the Office of Planning and Performance Improvement at Bryce, received the Health Care Hero Award from the West Council of the Alabama Hospital Association.

Each year, the Alabama Hospital Association honors individuals across the state in recognition of their heroic contributions to health care, naming them "Health Care Heroes." The annual awards are an effort to honor the dedication of health care workers in the state and to showcase various hospital jobs and related professions in hopes of encouraging students and others to consider a career in the health care industry.

Durand has worked at Bryce Hospital for more than 30 years, and more than 14 of those years in his current position. Durand has designed many initiatives at Bryce, and some have been implemented by Central Office and throughout the state. Thus, his efforts have positively impacted patient care not only at Bryce, but also within the state.

Co-workers that nominated him said, "He is most dedicated to ensuring that the patients receive the best care possible. Throughout his years of service in the department, he has demonstrated a track record of improving the clinical outcomes and processes at Bryce."

Community Mental Health Board Conference

The Alabama Council of Community Mental Health Boards will hold its 33rd Annual Conference May 9-10, 2007, at the Birmingham Jefferson Civic Center. The theme of the conference is "Celebrating 40 Years of Community Mental Health: Making a Difference Together." The conference will be comprised of six workshop sessions presented by experts in their fields covering more than 45 topics including geriatric, adolescent, children, clinical, legal and administrative subjects such as *Access to Mental Health Services in Alabama*, *Adolescents with Co-occurring Disorders*, *Depression and Suicide*, *360 Degree Client - The Future of Addictions Treatment* and *Practical Management of Common Psychiatric Problems in Older Adults* presented by experts in their fields.

The conference will also feature a keynote presentation by Pete Earley, national speaker and author of "Crazy", which examines the mental health and criminal justice system. An awards luncheon at the Sheraton Civic Center Hotel featuring guest speaker Alva Lambert, Esq., Political Humorist, will take place on the second day of the conference.

Reservations should be made by April 7, 2007 to secure the conference rate. To find out more about the conference, including how to register, contact Diane Dill at 205-664-2114.

Meador-Woodruff Receives Prestigious Mentoring Award

James H. Meador-Woodruff, M.D., Heman E. Drummond Professor and chair of the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Neurobiology at UAB, has received the 2007 Kempf Fund Award for research development in psychobiological psychiatry from the American Psychiatric Institute for Research and Education (APIRE). The award recognizes a senior researcher who has made a significant contribution to research on the causes and treatment of schizophrenia as both a researcher and a mentor.

Meador-Woodruff is mentor to Robert E. McCullumsmith, M.D., Ph.D., who joined the UAB faculty along with Meador-Woodruff from the University of Michigan in 2006. The award will provide funding to support development of McCullumsmith's research career while working in a mentor-trainee relationship with Meador-Woodruff.

Meador-Woodruff is known for his research in the neurochemical circuitry and gene expression of schizophrenia — how different areas of the brain communicate with each other and the role played in this by the expression of genes associated with signal transduction mediated by the neurotransmitters glutamate, dopamine and serotonin, within individual cells in the nervous system.

McCullumsmith's research focus is examining the expression and function of glutamate transporters in corticothalamic circuitry in schizophrenia. His clinical interests include personality disorders, treatment refractory conditions and the somatoform disorders. He is also the attending physician for new faculty consultation clinics, which provide outpatient treatment by psychiatry resident physicians.

Advocate Uses His Experiences to Help Others

Buren Smith is keeping busy these days by trying to give others the same help he received in his journey through substance abuse recovery. Buren serves as president of Friends of Recovery, Morgan, Madison, Lawrence, Limestone and Cullman counties (FORMLL), which is a non-profit organization and a division of the Alabama Alcohol & Drug Abuse Association. The group works to eliminate barriers in recovery from addiction.

Buren is working on many projects through his presidency with FORMLL, including coordinating a local viewing of the HBO "Addiction" documentary and spearheading a letter writing campaign to the Governor to make him aware of the need for more funding for state-funded treatment services. Also on the plate for the group is working with legislators to rid the stigma surrounding substance abuse and showing them that it is a disease, and that people can recover.

He believes it is important to get involved in advocacy because he feels he has a debt he owes to society and because, as he puts it, "If people in recovery don't believe in others who are currently facing substance abuse issues, who will? A lot of people want to end their addiction, but don't know how or don't have access to services."

Buren is now past the one-year mark into recovery. He has many hobbies including playing guitar and listening to music. He is also enjoying working on Web site development, something he is working on now as webmaster of FORMLL's site. His great joy is that he is a proud grandfather of a grandson who is about to turn one year old. He is grateful that he gets to spend time with his grandson, and says that, "If I was not in recovery, I probably wouldn't have that opportunity."



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